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State Dept. review completed

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Australia: Prime Minister Gorton has shown a renewed determination to withdraw Australia's ground forces from Malaysia and Singapore within the next few years.

A major review of Australia's defense policy is under way and should be completed in several months. In this context, Ambassador Crook reports that remarks made privately by the prime minister on 18 August indicated that by 1971 he would order all Australian forces except a few advisers and a small air contingent to pull out of the area. This would parallel the UK military withdrawal. Gorton stated that he could see no sense in a continued Australian troop commitment because by itself the force was too small to be of importance in an emergency.

Gorton's views conflict with those of External Affairs Minister Hasluck and Defense Minister Fairhall, who reportedly are still strongly in favor of the Asian mainland "forward defense" policy of former prime ministers Menzies and Holt. Ambassador Crook, however, believes that little can be done to change Gorton's mind.

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